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# THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISABLED INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

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I SHALL not discuss the subject assigned me from the point of view of the war or of demobilization, for I am convinced that the duties and responsibilities of the government to its industrial workers are the same in view of the existing conditions incident to the transition from war to peace that they have always been, and that they must always remain, while it may be true that the existing emergency conditions argue for a prompt and effective discharge by the government of its duty and its responsibility.

During the past year in which I have had supervision for the Secretary of the Treasury of the bureau of the Government which has represented the discharge by the Government of its responsibility for disabled soldiers and sailors, I have become more and more convinced that the responsibility of the government for disabled industrial workers was of the same general kind and degree, and that it was the duty and responsibility of the government to recognize its obligation to disabled industrial workers, and to recognize the real significance of the fact that in a sense they were performing necessary duties which involved the risk of life, duties necessary for the preservation of industry and society and the general welfare. In this sense they are soldiers, and there can be but little dissimilarity in their relations to the general government.

The disability of the worker diminishes earning power and reduces output. It results in loss to the worker and his dependents, to the industry of which he is a part, and to society at large. It is the responsibility of the Government to do what it may consistently with the general welfare to prevent loss to the citizen, to industry, and to society; and if it cannot be prevented, so to order and adjust and distribute its direct and indirect incidence as to make possible its alleviation and repair.

The worker may be disabled from a variety of causes. His disability may result from injury or disease, and injury or disease may result either from causes incident to his industrial

service or from causes in no way connected with his service. He may be disabled through old age or through inability to obtain employment, or he may be permanently removed from the field of industry by death. Whatever the cause of his disability, the loss to the worker and his dependents, to industry, and to society is largely the same. The farmer also is an industrial worker, and the tenant farmer who is compelled to labor under unsanitary and impossible conditions obtaining with tenant farmers in many sections of the country, is entitled when disabled to the same consideration as other industrial workers. The responsibility of the government to the tenant farmer is the same as it is to any other disabled industrial worker; and it has seemed to me that in the very admirable address which Mr. Kent has just made, every word of which I endorse, he has pointed out a feasible, practicable and sane way for the government to discharge that responsibility.

It can make but little difference to the worker whether he is unable to work because of illness or injury contracted in the line of duty or illness or injury contracted without the line of duty, or through the disability of old age or because he is unable to obtain employment; and if the wife and children of the worker and others dependent upon him for support have been deprived of the bread-winning force upon which they must rely through the disability or death of the bread-winner, the cause of their handicap and loss is unimportant. Nor is it of great consequence where the blame for the disability of the worker may be fixed in any case. The loss to all concerned must be real and substantial wherever the blame for the disability may rest, whether upon society, or upon industry, or upon the worker himself.

Much of this loss can be prevented, and in the nature of things much of it cannot be prevented. It would seem that to-day there would be little disagreement to the proposal that it is the responsibility of government to exercise its power to the utmost limits to make every provision reasonably possible for the prevention of the disability of industrial workers from whatever cause. When all is done that can be and disability does occur, as it must, a portion of the loss inevitably must fall upon society as a whole, another portion upon the industry affected, and still another upon the worker and his dependents. It is the responsibility of government to make such reasonable

provisions as lie within its power to enable the worker to carry his inevitable share of the burden to the best advantage. It is unnecessary for the Government to carry the loss of the worker. It is only necessary that it make available to the worker the necessary machinery whereby he may carry it himself to the best advantage of himself and his dependents, of industry, and of society. An important function of Government is to provide machinery for co-operation through the use of which the citizen is enabled to do for himself, through co-operation with others, things which it would be impracticable or impossible for him to do acting alone.

The average worker earns enough not only to sustain himself and those dependent upon him while he is at work, but in addition enough to carry him through the periods of disability resulting from accident, disease, unemployment and old age, and to provide for his dependents after his death. Experience has demonstrated that, taking human nature as it is, the individual worker or individual citizen of whatever calling, if relegated to his own thrift and his own facilities for setting aside and keeping in hand and improving that portion of his earnings necessary to provide against these inevitable contingencies, is not likely to have in hand the resources necessary to meet them as they arise. Experience has also demonstrated that if the worker or the citizen can have the means of co-operation with other workers in making this provision, it is easy for him certainly to provide reasonable protection against losses resulting from his disability whenever it may occur or from whatever cause. The machinery necessary to enable the worker thus reasonably to indemnify himself and his dependents and at the same time measurably indemnify both industry and society is the machinery of insurance. The practicability of the individual indemnifying himself against loss through this form of co-operation is no longer open to question. The proofs are manifest on every hand. Originally the individual was left to his own initiative and resources in carrying the risk of the loss of his property by fire or of the loss resulting from personal accident or disease or death, or from various other causes. But long since provision was made whereby the individual might join a group and pool his risks so that the loss, when it occurred, should be absorbed and conveniently distributed throughout the group, each member carrying his risk of loss,

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but through co-operation with others similarly situated carrying it in such fashion that when the loss occurred it falls lightly upon all and harshly upon none.

A decade ago industrial workers throughout this country were left to their own haphazard initiative to carry the risk to themselves and their dependents resulting from their death or disability from occupational causes. Today the laws of more than thirty-eight states of the Union require that industrial workers shall be employed only under terms providing for their safe and reasonable indemnity against loss through disability arising from occupational causes.

Why cannot a government provide machinery whereby the worker may be indemnified against disability from any other cause as well as from occupational disease or injury? The practicability of such protection through insurance has been demonstrated by the Government. It lies within the power of the Government to make the existing partial protection complete. It is its responsibility to do it.

The proposal that the Government shall provide for the reasonable protection of the worker against loss resulting from his inability to work from whatever cause, through the medium of insurance, does not necessarily involve any proposal for Government insurance. The necessary governmental requirement is that contracts of employment shall include provision for definite and safe insurance indemnity against the disability of the worker, the solvency of the insurer and the terms and conditions of the insurance to be acceptable to the state. The proposal does involve the wide and salutary expansion of the utility of insurance as an institution, and it may very well involve the possibility of a very broad expansion of the private business of insurance upon fair terms and at reasonable rates. Should the Government make such a requirement it might prove advisable or necessary for the Government to provide for carrying, through its own insurance facilities, such of the necessary risks involved as private insurers were unable or unwilling to carry upon terms and conditions necessary to the general welfare, just as quite recently it was found necessary for the Government to provide its own facilities for the carrying of various insurance risks necessary to the winning of the war, for which no adequate private facilities existed.

There are numerous details, many of them important and

some of them most difficult, connected with the proposal. There is the very important point of protection against malin-gering, which it is necessary to meet in all insurance proposals, and the question often raised as to who shall pay the cost of the insurance—who shall make the necessary contributions to provide the funds necessary for the desired indemnity. These are questions of ways and means, and it is the responsibility of the Government to solve them equitably and fairly, and in such manner that the plan will work. It is important no less to society and industry than to the worker himself and his dependents that he shall receive a living wage affording not only enough properly to sustain him and his dependents while he is at work, but also enough to enable him, through co-operation with others similarly situated, to indemnify himself and his dependents against losses resulting from his inability to work for any cause. The cost of all these elements must come ultimately from the product of the worker's toil. They are all essential parts of the living wage, and it is not of great importance whether the part representing the cost of his indemnity against disability is paid to him in money and by him repaid to an insurance fund, or is paid directly to that fund without his intervention.

The value to industry and to society of providing this complete protection against the disability of industrial workers cannot be over-estimated. It cannot increase, but must largely reduce the burden which existing conditions force both industry and society to bear. The cost of making the provision, on whomsoever it might fall directly or indirectly, would not be an expense but an investment. Viewed from any standpoint, it will pay, and it will come into being as rapidly as society becomes awakened to that fact. Under the stupendous impulse of unselfishness afforded by the great war which has just ended in a glorious victory for unselfishness, it should become easier to realize that unselfishness pays.

At a dinner in Washington recently I heard a distinguished Frenchman say, that if rascals could understand how much it pays to be honest, all men would become honest through sheer rascality. By parity of reasoning, if selfish human beings can be brought to understand how largely and directly self-interest is promoted by the general welfare, all men will become unselfish through sheer greed.